

The Gage, Keith and Ascher Buildings
18 and 30 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1065

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDITIONAL
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE GAGE, KEITH AND ASCHER BUILDINGS

HABS No. IL-1065

Location:

Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Today the Gage Brothers and Company building, located at 18 South Michigan, is known as the 18 South Michigan Building. It is connected to the Edson Keith and Company building, which also uses 18 South Michigan as its address. Prior to 1909 (when Chicago street addresses were changed) the address of the Gage Brothers and Company building was 130 South Michigan; sometimes the location was described as being at 129-131 South Michigan. The address of the Edson Keith and Company building was described as either 132 or 133 and 134 South Michigan. (There were two doors). The Theodore Ascher and Company building, located at 30 South Michigan, is known today as the 30 South Michigan Building. Prior to 1909 the address of the Theodore Ascher and Company building was 135-136 South Michigan. (This building also had two doors).

The three buildings are located on the west side of South Michigan Avenue, approximately 160' south of Madison Street and 64' north of Monroe Street.

Present Owners:

18 South Michigan:

(The Gage and the Keith Buildings)

The estate of Katherine Dexter McCormick appears to own the property according to Document 716/50 listed on page 21 in Book 461 New at the office of the Cook County Recorder of Deeds. John Henden, the building superintendent, claims that the property is owned by Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The property is managed by Chinnock and Doughty, 104 South Michigan, Chicago, Illinois.

30 South Michigan:

(The Ascher Building)

According to Document 14861522 listed on page 24 in Book 461 Old at the office of the Cook County Recorder of Deeds, the property is held in Trust #4772, LaSalle National Bank, Chicago, Illinois. Asher J. Goldfine claims that the property is owned by Mrs. Sue Yudelman and Mr. Morton Friedman. The property is managed by Asher J. Goldfine and Company, 45 East Ohio, Chicago, Illinois.

Present Occupants: Various business offices occupy the buildings. The ground floor of the Gage Building is occupied by American Express and Air France. Hornblower, Weeks, Hemphill and Noyes and Peck and Peck occupy the ground floor of the Keith Building. The Ascher Building is occupied by Pan American, a tailor and a fur store.

Present Use: Stores and offices.

Significance: All three buildings are significant examples of Chicago School architecture. The Gage Building, with its unique, gracefully-ornamented facade designed by Louis Sullivan, was to be one of the architect's last commissions in Chicago. Today there are only five Sullivan-designed buildings in the city's central business district.

The Keith and the Ascher Buildings, although less well known, are typical of the several buildings designed in the 1890s and early 1900s by Holabird and Roche. On the exterior the buildings have little applied ornament; brick piers and spandrels surrounding rows of Chicago windows visually express the buildings' underlying skeleton. In their simplicity, these facades look ahead to the Chicago skyscrapers of the 1960s and 1970s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Plans were drawn up for the buildings during 1898. With blueprints completed, the architects stamped them with the notation that "Bids will be opened September 26, 1898, at 12 o'clock noon." Document S. 1098 at the Department of building, City of Chicago, shows that, for the Keith and the Ascher Buildings, an application was filed November 1, 1898. Construction proceeded during 1899. The October 17, 1899 issue of the Economist stated that "The exterior of the McCormick Buildings is practically completed. They are to be finished and ready for occupancy by November 1." Four months later, an article in the February, 1900, issue of The Brickbuilder appeared titled, "The McCormick Stores at Chicago Completed."
2. Architects: The firm of Holabird and Roche designed and supervised the construction of the Gage, Keith, and Ascher Buildings. The facade of the Gage Building, however, was designed by Louis H. Sullivan.

The partnership of Holabird and Roche lasted from 1883 to 1927, and descendants of the firm today practice in Chicago under the

name of Holabird and Root. Carl Condit, on page 116 of The Chicago School of Architecture, comments that "In the long period of their practice, in the number and excellence of their designs, William Holabird and Martin Roche most completely represented the purpose and the achievements of the Chicago School....Early in their practice Holabird and Roche knew that they were on the right path, and they followed it, with undeviating persistence." Of the many buildings the firm designed for Chicago, those that are similar to the Keith and Ascher Buildings which survive today include: the Marquette Building, 1894, the McClurg Building, 1900; the 325 West Jackson Building, 1904, 1911; the Chicago Building, 1904; the Mandel Brothers Annex, 1900, 1905; and the Brooks Building, 1909-10.

In contrast to the work of Holabird and Roche, Louis Sullivan's individual approach to each of his buildings is unmistakable. His design solution to the facade of the Gage Building met the needs of his client in a manner unlike any of his other buildings. Still, his style, as expressed in every Sullivan-designed commercial building, is cohesive in that he evolved a highly artistic form of original ornament applied to the steel frame building. George Elmslie did the finishing touches on the Gage facade.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

- a. Legal descriptions: The three buildings are located on Lot 5 (then divided into sublots 1 and 2), Lot 8, and the north 8 feet of Lot 9, Block 1, Canal Trustees Subdivision of Lots in North 1/2 Fractional Section 15, Township 39 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian.

The Gage Building: Sublot 1 of Lot 5 and the north 22 feet of Lot 5 of above.

The Keith Building: South 18 feet of Lot 5 and north 44 feet of Lot 8 of above.

The Ascher Building: South 36 feet of Lot 8 and north 8 feet of Lot 9 of above.

- b. Chain of title: The abstract of the chain of title is from Book 461 Old, page 17, 23 and 24 and from Book 461 New, pages 21 and 27, office of the Cook County Recorder of Deeds.

1. The Gage Building: On November 18, 1864, Cyrus Hall McCormick purchased Lot 5 from Isaac H. Burch (Document 40614). It apparently remained in the estate after McCormick's death (in 1884) until January 24, 1900, when

Nettie F. McCormick (the wife of Cyrus) deeded the property to their son, Stanley R. McCormick, for whom the Gage Building was built (Document 2947706). Records show that the property was leased to a Frederick Bode et al December 31, 1902 (Document 3398674). Apparently, however, the property ownership remained in Stanley R. McCormick's name until 1947, when he died (Document 459/637). The last entry in the tract book in the Recorder's office shows the death of Stanley R. McCormick's wife, Katherine Dexter McCormick, June 25, 1968 (Document 715/50).

2. The Keith Building: On November 18, 1864, Cyrus Hall McCormick purchased Lot 5 from Isaac H. Burch (Document 40614). On July 14, 1866, McCormick purchased the north half of Lot 8 from Elijah W. Herrickson (Document 40594). It apparently remained in McCormick's estate until January 24, 1900, when his wife deeded the property to their son, Stanley R. McCormick, for whom the Keith Building was built (Document 2947706). The property remained in Stanley R. McCormick's name until 1947, when he died (Document 459/637). The last entry in the tract book in the Recorder's office shows the death of McCormick's wife, June 25, 1968 (Document 715/50).
3. The Ascher Building: On May 5, 1892, Mary V. McCormick (Stanley R. McCormick's sister) purchased the south 1/2 of Lot 8 and the north 8 feet of Lot 9 from Eugene K. Butler (Document 1661626). On November 17, 1898 she deeded the property to her mother, Nettie F. McCormick (Document 28363027). On January 24, 1900, Nettie F. McCormick deeded the property to her son Stanley R. McCormick, for whom the Ascher Building was built (Document 2947706). The property remained in Stanley R. McCormick's name until August 25, 1945, when his wife, Katherine Dexter McCormick, Fowler McCormick (their son), and the Continental Illinois Bank and Trust Company of Chicago, declared Stanley R. McCormick an incompetent person and deeded the land and building to Harry Simon (Document 13591009). The last transfer of title appears to have been made July 10, 1950, when it was placed in Trust #4772, LaSalle National Bank, Chicago, Illinois.

c. Additional information:

It was reported on page 49 of the July 9, 1898 issue of the Economist that Stanley R. McCormick would construct three fine buildings and rent them to tenants on a ten-year term beginning January 1, 1899. On page 397 of the March 20, 1902

issue of the Economist it was reported that "Gage Bros. & Co. purchased from Stanley R. McCormick an 8-story building at 129-31 Michigan and have leased the ground on which it stands from Mr. McCormick for 99 years at a rental of \$12,400 a year, being 4% on a capitalization of \$310,000 or \$5,000 a front foot and \$18.12 a square foot. The annual rent was to be a uniform percentage of the cost of the land and buildings, and the Gage Brothers and Company, who were to occupy the northernmost store, offered to pay additional rent at the same percentage on the increased cost of employing Louis Sullivan and erecting such a front as Sullivan would design. They did so because they thought it would benefit their business to an equal degree." According to an article on page 254 of the December, 1899 issue of The Brickbuilder, "They put an exact commercial value on Louis Sullivan's art; otherwise he would not have been called in."

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Contractor for the project was the George A. Fuller Company. Fireproofing was done by the Pioneer Fireproof Construction Company. Construction of the electrical elevators was by Eaton and Prince Company. The Winslow Brothers Company handled all the iron work. The Northwestern Terra Cotta Company executed Sullivan's facade.
5. Original plans and construction: It was not always intended that the Gage Building be eight stories high. An article in the September 17, 1898 issue of the Economist calls for three six-story buildings. Later, the October 8, 1898 issue noted that "Gage Bros. & Co.'s and Keith Company's buildings will each be seven stories high...." Microfilm Roll #19, frame 242 (at the Burnham Library) is a front-elevation drawing by Sullivan, dated September 30, 1898, showing the Gage Building to be seven stories high. The Ascher Building was built to be six stories high. (The Ascher and the Gage Buildings were later raised; see Alterations and Additions).

Some original blueprints for construction of the Gage Building are to be found at the architectural office of Holabird and Root, 300 West Adams, Chicago, Illinois.

Many of the original blueprints and elevation drawings are on microfilm (Roll 19, page 236-319) at the Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago, Adams and Michigan, Chicago, Illinois.

6. Alterations and additions: Numerous alterations have been made on all three buildings. Generally these concern plumbing changes, moving of fire escapes, the addition of dumbwaiters and elevators, and the removal and addition of partitions.

The most extreme changes have been made, over the years, to the Gage Building. Plans for additional stories to the original eight were drawn up by Holabird and Roche in 1901 and 1902. Cost estimates ranged from \$50,000 to \$70,000. A building permit was filled out on September 17, 1902, and, after the Gage Brothers and Company completed purchase of the building, construction began. F.H. Wells of the Wells Brothers Company contracted for the framing of four more floors. Upon completion of the structural changes, the old cornice and ornamental work were merely reset four stories higher. Thus the Gage Building looked very much the same as it had before; it was just 12-stories high instead of eight. No further significant changes were made to the Gage Building until the 1950s when window sashes and frames were replaced (Permit #52997, dated January 12, 1951 and Permit #A93779, dated June 16, 1953), and the lobby and entrance were remodeled, Mielke and Smith, architects (Permit #B79414, dated August 19, 1952). The May 5, 1952 issue of the Chicago Daily News reported that the ground floor of the 18 South Michigan Building would be "improved with a new exterior of granite." The article noted that plans called for a widened glass entrance, a remodeled granite lobby, and floor space arranged to suit the building tenants.

The most significant changes to the Keith Building were the alterations to its first-floor stores (Permit #72474, dated August 14, 1946) and some remodeling done for Peck and Peck. According to Permit #B204474, dated October 5, 1956, Peck and Peck, using Mielke and Smith as architects, replaced some marble on the front of the store with granite.

Important changes to the Ascher Building include remodeling of the lobby and the addition of a storey. Permit #B220086, applied for by LaSalle National Bank Trust #4772 on June 28, 1957, called for lobby alterations. Robert Saichek was the architect. Permit #B430176 dated December 8, 1970, called for the addition of a 7th floor, designed by the architectural firm of Altman and Saichek and completed in 1972. The addition is handsome, faced in red brick to match the original six floors.

- B. Historical Context: Stanley R. McCormick was given the property upon which the Gage, Keith and Ascher Buildings were constructed by his father Cyrus Hall McCormick, inventor of the reaper.

In 1959, the Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks, which preceded the present Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, cited the Gage Building (only) for "the fine relations established between piers, windows and wall surfaces; the excellence of proportions throughout; and the imaginative use of original ornament."

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The facades of the Gage, Keith and Ascher Buildings all take their form from the steel skeleton beneath. Sullivan's Gage is unquestionably more subtle and delicately ornamented. Those designed by Holabird and Roche, however, are especially refined examples of their work and, in the avoidance of ornament, seem to look to the future more directly than does Sullivan's design.
2. Condition of fabric: All three buildings are in very good condition and are well taken care of. They have successfully been converted from loft buildings to office buildings.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: As constructed, the Gage, Keith and Ascher Buildings each had one basement and were eight, seven and six stories respectively. The Gage Building measures 58' x 160' and was originally 112' high; the Keith, 62' x 101' and is still 101' high; and the narrower Ascher Building measures 44' x 101' and was originally 92' high. Stories added have made the Gage twelve and the Ascher seven. The Keith remains at seven stories.
2. Foundations: According to Richard Nickel's unpublished notes taken in 1958 from Tube #188 of hectograph drawings at the office in Holabird, Root and Burgee: Page one "shows the foundations for the side walls and the columns which hold the party walls as having an extra wide base. These heavy-duty ones have 18 piles upon which rests a platform 11'6" x 11'6" which decreases to a cast-iron base plate and then the column. The in-between columns have 13 piles in the footings and a platform 10' square which converges by steps up to the cast-iron base (which is below the basement floor line)."
3. Wall construction: The Keith and Ascher Buildings have facades that are grids of molded red brick and red terra cotta. Sullivan's facade for the Gage Building also forms a grid, but of buff-colored terra cotta.

The ground-floor windows of all three buildings were once framed in wide bands of cast iron surface ornament. Unlike Sullivan's lavish ornament, the cast iron ornament on the Keith and Ascher Buildings was simple and not distinctive. Today, on all the buildings, a granite facing surrounds the doors and first-floor windows. Some pieces reassembled from the frieze above the ground

floor windows of the Gage Building may be seen in the gallery of the Burnham Library at the Art Institute of Chicago. Richard Nickel's notes indicate that other sections may be in the collection of the University of Illinois, of Notre Dame University and of various individuals.

There is some question as to whether any ornament actually remains underneath the granite facing on the Gage Building. There are two handwritten notes by Miss Hoffmeister, formerly librarian of the Burnham Library, found on a clipping in the library from the Chicago Daily News titled "Another Building to Get a Face Lifting" dated May 10, 1952. The first note, dated September 25, 1952, states "The Sullivan ornament will be covered but not destroyed according to Mr. Hieronymus of Aldis & Co." (then the building manager); the second note states, "was removed N. 52." It is generally agreed among local architectural historians that no ornament remains on the building. None the less, John Henden, of Chinnock and Doughty, has stated to me that there is some ornament still under the granite sheathing.

Sullivan's use of intricately detailed foliate ornament in the Gage Building is noteworthy-- both in the cast iron ornamental panels that once decorated the ground floor and above, in the terra cotta work. Examples of his terra cotta ornament can be seen protruding symmetrically on each spandrel and in large flowering cartouches terminating the two vertical piers at the parapet.

4. Framing, structural system: The structural system for all three buildings was designed by Holabird and Roche and is steel frame. The facade walls are non-bearing, and there is no attempt at simulating traditional masonry construction.

The steel frame of the buildings is actually one continuous unit throughout. On page 253 of the December 1899 issue of The Brickbuilder, the party-wall system of the buildings is described as follows: "The three stores are constructed as one, and can be thrown open into one; but the party walls are built around the steel frame, first by covering the steel columns and girders with hollow, semi-porous fine clay, and then enclosing the same construction with 4" of common brick and filling the panels between the columns and girders with 12" brick walls." Today, the party walls between the Keith and Gage Buildings have been completely thrown open.

5. Porches and bulkheads: A 3' bulkhead is shown for the Keith and Ascher Buildings in the Holabird and Roche blueprints.

The Gage Building used to have a glass porch or storm vestibule on the ground floor.

6. Chimneys: The plans of Holabird and Roche show two stacks each 5' in diameter, one at the northwest corner of the Ascher Building, one at the northwest corner of the Gage Building.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The original Michigan Avenue entrances to the three buildings no longer exist. Today there are only two Michigan Avenue entrances, one at 18 (which serves both the Gage and Keith Buildings) and one at 30 South Michigan.

The Keith and the Ascher Buildings both had two 5'6" doorways, each with two doors opening out and each with a glass transom. In the Ascher Building the door openings were equidistant from the center of the facade, flanking that which above the first floor is the central pier; in the Keith Building they were also equidistant from the center of the facade, but contained within the building's central bay. Only a simple iron band topped the door transoms of the Ascher Building, whereas a symmetrical, rather classical, ornament incorporating the anthemion motif topped each of the door transoms of the Keith Building.

On Michigan Avenue there was one rather wide doorway to the Gage Building. It was located on the left side of the north bay and capped by a semi-circular arched lintel, ornamented with Sullivan's intricate foliate designs.

- b. Windows: The most important difference between the facades designed by Holabird and Roche for the Keith and Ascher Buildings and that designed by Sullivan for the Gage Building lies in the treatment of the fenestration.

The Ascher Building is two bays wide, the Keith, three. Above the first floor both buildings employ the "Chicago window", a form of fenestration frequently used by Holabird and Roche. The Chicago window is typically a large fixed pane of clear glass flanked by smaller windows with movable sash. Their purpose was to admit the maximum amount of light and air.

The three-bay-wide Gage Building employs large window units of almost the same size as the other buildings. But unlike the Keith and Ascher Buildings, the Gage Building had a 4' high strip of luxfer prisms over plate glass windows. (A luxfer prism is a piece of glass cut into numerous prismatic shapes of varying angles— so constructed for there to be no apparent

division of light into its primary colors). On each bay of the second floor beneath the prisms was a single sheet of plate glass; on all the floors above, the windows beneath the prisms were casements, divided on each floor by the two piers into bays of four and five windows.

The purpose of the luxfer prism, introduced to the building trade in 1896, was to reduce the glare of direct sunlight and to carry the rays deep into a room. Original plans for the Keith and Ascher Buildings show that the upper half of practically all the windows were to contain luxfer prisms; this was never translated into reality. It is interesting to note that in the 1898 photo of the three buildings all the shades in the Keith and Ascher Buildings are pulled down half way to cut glare, a problem apparently solved by Sullivan's fenestration plan for the Gage Building. Luxfer prisms were used above the plate glass show-windows on the ground floor of all three buildings.

The original plans for the three buildings show that all the windows on the west facade, designed by Holabird and Roche, are double-hung.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape: The roofs are flat with skylights.
- b. Cornice: The cornices on the Keith and Ascher Buildings projected out 3' and were made of galvanized iron. Both have been removed. The soffits were ornamented in classical motifs. The cornice on the Gage Building was of terra cotta and projected out 3'-6 3/4" beyond the building line. It too has been removed.

C. Description of Interior: Only the essentially rectangular plan of the three buildings remains as it originally was. Above the first floor, the loft space, once used for light manufacturing, has been converted into hallways and offices. Elevators, stairways, heating, mechanical and electrical systems have all been altered.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The three buildings face east on Michigan Avenue and are flanked on the south by the University Club, designed in 1909 by Holabird and Roche and flanked on the north by the Chicago Athletic Club, designed in 1893 by Henry Ives Cobb.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Original blueprints for the Gage Building. On file at Holabird and Root, 300 West Adams, Chicago, Illinois. Includes Sections A, B, C.

Blueprints on microfilm (Roll 19, page 236-319) at the Art Institute of Chicago, Burnham Library, Adams and Michigan, Chicago, Illinois.

B. Early Views:

The Art Institute of Chicago has two old views of the Gage Building. One was taken during construction; the other was taken at the building's completion, but before the addition of four stories.

The March 1899 issue of Inland Architect and News Record shows a photo of architect Louis Sullivan's water color drawing of the Gage Building.

In the December 1899 issue of The Brickbuilder there is a construction photo of the Gage Building and a detail of the ornamented terminals of the intermediate piers.

Particularly good photos of the Gage Building are to be found in the August 1900 issue of Inland Architect and News Record. One is a double page general view, the other, a detail of the lower stories.

A photo, dated 1898, of the Gage, Keith and Ascher Buildings is in the collection of the Chicago Architectural Photographing Co., 1616 North Damen, Chicago, Illinois 60647.

In 1910, The George A. Fuller Company published Prominent Buildings Erected by the George A. Fuller Company. Of special interest is a photo showing the west side of Michigan Avenue from Madison south to Monroe Street. Included are the (now 12 story) Gage Building, the Keith Building and the Ascher Building.

C. Interviews:

Building managers -

18 South Michigan: Chinnock and Doughty
104 South Michigan
Chicago, Illinois

30 South Michigan: J. Ascher Goldfine and Company
43 East Ohio
Chicago, Illinois

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Letter dated March 4, 1953 to Edith Elmslie, from William Gray Purcell. In the estate of Richard Nickel.

Letter dated September 20, 1960 to Richard Nickel from Katherine Dexter McCormick (Mrs. Stanley McCormick). In the estate of Richard Nickel.

Nickel, Richard. Notes and photos for an unpublished book. (Place of repository not given).

Records of Ownership, Cook County, Recorder of Deeds, first floor, County Building, Chicago, Illinois.

Building permits and other records, 1898-present, Building Department, 9th floor City Hall, Chicago, Illinois.

Preliminary documentation on the Gage Building for the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, compiled by Susan S. Benjamin, Dated August 11, 1970.

2. Secondary and published sources:

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"Three Fine Buildings," Economist, XX, (July 9, 1898). p. 49.

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National Park Service
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Data pages 1 through 13 were previously transmitted to the Library of Congress. This is data page 14.

INVENTORY OF PHOTOGRAMMETRIC IMAGES

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One survey control contact print per plate; survey control
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EAST ELEVATION--LEVEL

LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-301R *

EAST ELEVATION--LEVEL

Left and right overlap: 90%

LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-302L

EAST ELEVATION--INCLINED

LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-302R *

EAST ELEVATION--INCLINED

Left and right overlap: 90%

GAGE, KEITH AND ASCHER
BUILDINGS
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Data (Page 15)

PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

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